



Course Evaluation:

Developing Interpretive Center Media

Harpers Ferry Center, Interpretive Media Institute
August 12 –15, 2003

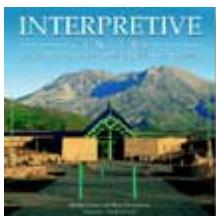


Participants came from the National Park Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, and the State of Maryland.

The Interpretive Media Institute presented “Developing Interpretive Center Media” at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV, with trips to Shenandoah National Park and Harpers Ferry Center, Harpers Ferry, WV

IMI designed the course to assist field staff in managing interpretive media projects related to park facilities such as visitor centers, museums, nature centers, and historic structures. Participants learned the steps involved in developing exhibits, museum displays, video presentations, and historic furnishings exhibits. They also received training in working within budgets; scheduling work; hiring and working with planning, design, and production contractors; and how to insure the preservation of artifacts and other museum objects.

In addition to familiarizing participants with the nuts and bolts of media, instructors took time to help define excellence in media and its historical role in parks. Don Branch gave an illustrated talk on “What Is a Good Exhibit?” featuring examples from the dawning of history to the present. Ron Zimmerman, Michael Gross, and Jim Buchholz of the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, presented a multimedia program that cataloged the origin of



interpretive centers and nature centers in the United States. The insights they presented came from many pioneers in the world of parks, interpretation and media, including Stephen Mather, Conrad Wirth, Enos Mills, and HFC’s own Marc Sagan. Gross and Zimmerman’s new 236-page book, *Interpretive Centers, The History Design and Development of Nature and Visitor Centers*, was a valuable course resource given to all participants.

Instructors used HFC's Media Development Process diagram, called the "Media Wheel," throughout the course to help clarify the phases of development.



Participants in similar courses told IMI in evaluations that more examples and case studies would aid comprehension of the complex processes at work in media development. Following that advice, IMI decided in this course to track a single case study from beginning to end. The recently installed Dickey Ridge Visitor Center at Shenandoah National Park served this purpose. With assistance from the park staff, course participants, could see not only examples of project phases, but the actual exhibits and film in place, as well as an opportunity to meet with the project team.

The field trip to Shenandoah provided a concrete example for course participants, but also feedback to the park managers and staff. In addition to the verbal comments given in an informal

evaluation session at the park, many participants submitted written comments to assist the park in making improvements to the project. A number of participants commented on the light color of the park relief model. Reviewers thought a different color palette might identify the park more clearly and be easier on the eyes.



Elective sessions held at Harpers Ferry Center and Mather Training Center on Friday, August 15, opened elements of the course to HFC and Mather staff. In addition to a repeat of the University of Wisconsin presentation on the history of interpretive centers, Parks Canada senior designers Dan Pach and Rob Ward gave two illustrated lectures on lessons learned in interpretive center development in Canada and France.

The course addressed elements of the curriculum for the following NPS core interpretive competencies: IDP Module 310, Planning Park Interpretation, and Module 311, Interpretive Media Development.

Course Objectives

- Learn how to manage a media project in collaboration with HFC and/or contractors.
- Learn the key principles for successful media projects.
- Understand basic media development processes.
- Define a media project strategy, and be able to use it to develop a media project in your park.
- Become familiar with NPS media standards.
- Understand cost estimating, funding, and programming procedures for media projects.
- Explain HFC's role in NPS media development, and learn how to effectively utilize HFC as a consulting partner on all projects.
- Identify how to establish and maintain better collaboration with media professionals throughout the life of a media project.



Course Participants and Staff

The twenty-five (25) participants included NPS or partner employees who currently—or soon will be—managing development of media in an interpretive center. More than thirty-five (35) others served as instructors, coordinators, resource persons, or staff assistants. Not all are pictured here.

Peter Givens (Blue Ridge Parkway) and Claire Comer (Shenandoah National Park) gave presentations based on their roles as field media specialists. Many HFC staff provided instruction and resource materials. See “Course Staff” document for a listing.



Nationally-known interpreters Ron Zimmerman (left), Jim Buchholz, and Michael Gross of the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, served as presenters and as resource persons. Gross and Zimmerman are authors of the Interpreters Handbook Series.

Standard NPS Evaluation Results

The highest possible value for each answer is 5.0

Course Name: **"Developing Interpretive Center Media"**

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Question and average rating	5	4	3	2	1
Overall, course objectives were met. 4.5	(14) 70	(13) 52	—	—	—
I came to this training event expecting to work toward specific competencies. 3.9	(9) 45	(12) 48	(2) 6	(2) 4	(2) 2
I was highly satisfied with the overall training, considering my original expectations. 4.6	(17) 85	(9) 36	(1) 3	—	—
The training directly related to the duties of my position. 4.5	(16) 80	(8) 32	(3) 9	—	—
The sessions in this program were presented in a logical sequence. 4.6	(18) 90	(7) 28	—	(1) 2	—
What I learned in this training will help me immediately in my job when I return. 4.5	(16) 80	(8) 32	(3) 9	—	—
What I learned in this training will be put to use in the next six months. 4.7	(22) 110	(3) 12	(2) 6	—	—
The course coordinator was effective. 4.7	(18) 90	(9) 36	—	—	—
The meeting room provided a good learning environment. 4.7	(21) 105	(4) 16	(2) 6	—	—
The facilities were suitable. 4.9	(24) 120	(3) 12	—	—	—

Written Comments

What were the strong points of the course?

- Presentation by University of Wisconsin team. Excellent flow or transitions from one topic to another. Genuine teamwork among Harpers Ferry staff.
- Organization – following Media Wheel. Real nuts and bolts, guidelines, examples, standards, suppliers. Using Dickey Ridge Project. Very knowledgeable presenters.



- Having great binders. Actual examples of projects to illustrate concepts. Dennis Vasquez and course coordinators; very intuitive on participant needs and tried to keep us on schedule.
- Covered complete process beginning to end, that's good.
- Organization, coordinator, speakers, handouts, field trip to Shenandoah.
- Examples, multiple perspectives, case studies. Comprehensive coverage of process, linkage to media wheel.
- Excellent handouts but cumbersome. Suggest having a table of contents for next course. Good to have someone who attended course last year with a completed project as a participant.
- Great info and great to meet the people who can help us with our projects.
- Well organized and presenters were very knowledgeable.
- Good contacts
- Process of planning to design work was very beneficial to walk through for 3 days. Good concept and technique. Thanks and well done!
- Networking opportunities were incredible! Presenters were knowledgeable and willing to share.
- Examples of different projects really spurred me to think of ways types of media and even design elements could be used on my forests.
- The course is packed full of resources to take back to the workplace. The course notebook is sure to become one of my most used resources.
- Using the Dickey Ridge project to tie all the pieces of the course together really worked well.
- Nice to attend multi-agency course.

- Great to hear so many voices. Thanks for inviting variety of presenters from HFC.
- Training as a whole managed well (logistics). Liked the goodies given out & trivia to keep people interested. Binders were nice to organize material. Thanks! Great Info presented.
- Good coordination, Dennis did a good job. Trip to SHEN was very informative, good exchange of information.
- Well organized, strong local team, fabulous facility, Dennis a wonderful facilitator. Dave Guiney & Interpretive Media Institute concept, good solid skilled presenters, friendly atmosphere, field trip.
- Well organized. HFC folks personable and helpful. Awesome facility and wonderful food.
- Trivia games great addition. Dennis good facilitator. Showed energy and enthusiasm, reasonable with speakers and timelines. Good access to phones and computers.
- Qualifications of speakers, field trip, real stories.
- Great organization. Appreciation for the HFC experience. Media Wheel is immensely helpful. Speakers were fascinating approachable, responsive to questions, ideas and concerns. Great job – Very helpful!
- Materials, binders, presentations field experience, presenters, contacts, making new friends
- Following a specific project, Dickey Ridge, through the course steps.
- Organization, and book of resources
- Presenters knowledgeable and well prepared. Well balanced and thorough overview. Great to have pens, pencil, highlighter, notepads and post-its provided.
- Summative MLK session was excellent. How about using a park that did everything by itself or used IDIQ contractors all the way?
- Binder is excellent.

What were the weak points of the course and how would you change them for the better?

- Too short. Should be 4 days at least.
- Some sessions didn't have handouts of their very important concepts requiring notetaking. Wanted more group discussion in some sessions like historic furnishings. Many sessions felt rushed. Consider extending to 5 days.

- Could have used more time, but amazing how much really usable information was covered in 3 days.
- Not enough time to absorb it all.
- Very NPS oriented. Would get instructors from all departments involved to cover general guidelines and send specific guidelines home or have mini-sessions to cover specifics.
- Prefer evaluation that allows you to evaluate each presenter. Lots more work for student but would like to address individuals and their techniques for future improvement.
- Mail out notebook prior to course for student review/preparation.
- Provide tour of HFC as part of class—not elective. Some travel does not allow for Friday opportunities. Very focused on NPS, involve others more.
- Asked for 6 MPs and LRIPs etc. but were not even used. Lugged them along for nothing.
- Compare NCTC exhibit hall to Dickey Ridge VC. Could have used an hour to study Dickey Ridge site. Expected to have a media showing (AV session) in NCTC theater.
- Nip in bud instructor saying this is 40 minutes of a one week course – waters down effectiveness.
- Presenters ran over – best to stick to schedule.
- Got too rushed in day 3.
- Add one more case study.
- Handouts should be double sided!
- Things were rushed, should extend to 3 ½ or 4 days.
- Day 4 should have been included as part of training, not elective.
- Advertise course better. I didn't hear about it until after the initial deadline.
- Include a short activity on cost estimates to illustrate differences in funding sources and key points in estimating. Include simple job-aid on fund sources and estimates.



- Why did we go to NCTC theater for AV session and not have any type of showing?
- The meeting room was awesome, but freezing! Would have liked more time spent on MLK exhibit.
- The interpretive planning/MIDS session was very rushed. Would be nice to integrate this session as the intro to the field

experience/trip to park.

- Did not explain HFC reorganization. 2 hours is too long without a bathroom break.
- Did we really need a chair demo from the coordinator?
- Have instructors for later sessions present for earlier sessions to limit overlap/repetition.
- Organization of manual- not clear where we were at times.
- Have all presenters' slides/notes available. Desire to tell case studies (while excellent) often confused objective of session.
- Have additional short activities, possible small group activity on first day.
- Too short.
- Field trip time could have been better used.
- More interaction with presenters after hours etc.
- Audiovisual session: would have been more valuable with seeing a video production to catch and hold our attention. Subject matter very difficult to present because of very technical treatments!
- ...Would be fantastic if it could be more interagency focused. As it was, it worked very well, but would like to know how my agency works through similar issues.
- Meeting room was too cold.
- More time for summative evaluations
- More examples of what worked and didn't work.
- Not sure what procedures applicable when working with HFC vs. contractors. Would have been interesting to compare and contrast a case study with flow charts specific to who is doing the work – HFC or a contractor.
- For those of us not NPS employees it was not clear whether or not your various programs and databases would be useful to us when working with contractors on our own projects.
- Stuff you probably can't change: rush, rush, rush! And a lot of info was crammed into a little time but all well worth it.
- I came needing more information about waysides but only had 45 minutes devoted to that aspect.
- Fabrication part waaay tooo strident — annoying.

- Would like to see a cost breakdown of a project beginning to end; how many come in on budget, if not where does extra money come from? Is it a goal for HFC to try to stay within budget? Perhaps it should be a 5-day program.
- Less lecture and more open dialogue, more class participation, ask in opening round table what expectations are (Teresa Vazquez did this well).
- Needed more time for scope of work contracting section.
- Course could have easily been extended another half/day. Important items on Thursday had to be presented very quickly. It's all good stuff!
- Needs to be longer or broken up into sequenced training sessions.

How will you apply the information and/or demonstrate the skill as a result of this training?

- Development of exhibits for an inter-agency visitor center.
- Will use for several current projects.
- Developing PMIS requests and draft exhibit/wayside plans and hopefully working with these projects training staff.
- Will be more effective in planning and producing future products.
- Being new to NPS, all aspects of the course will apply as well as design and implementation of a new exhibit in my VC.
- Will submit a competency for interpretive media. Will use Media Wheel in a project we are beginning.
- Create an exhibit plan
- 4 VC and exhibit projects ongoing
- Share with co-workers, be aware and put into practice this overload of information provided.
- I will be contacting HFC in the future for good examples of different types of exhibit contracts. As a Forest Service interpreter, I have no access to a good database of examples.
- This will assist me in writing PMIS projects (knowing what and how much to ask for) and will allow me to effectively participate in exhibit development.
- Within 9 months, I plan to start planning for new exhibits and audiovisuals. Info will be applied immediately. Contacts with HFC personnel great. We know who to call for what. Very timely and appropriate.

- Fits right into program of work to complete current exhibit installation of 1,000-sq. ft. Visitor Center. Another center to be built with 2,000-sq. ft. within a year.
- Right away I have 4-5 projects, a new visitor center, two redos on existing VC's, some wayside panels, a traveling exhibit as well as an interagency public lands guide. The planning aspects were very helpful plus all the tools NPS has online are huge help.
- Course will be useful as I refine our FWS interpretive and visitor services courses. I hope to incorporate some of the NPS objectives into my own courses.
- Will be helpful as I develop NCTC interpretive signs that I hope will be used as a teaching tool for students participating in future courses on campus.
- Daily in every media project, have reference material and new contacts.
- Get my project jump-started; it got lost in the shuffle. Now realize how involved the process is, so I hope folks at HFC are as helpful as I've always found them to be.
- Tap into the people network. Build a refined process in our own office. Incorporate ideas into future exhibit projects.
- After I process it all I plan to brief my co-workers. This will be vital as we move into planning phase that we know the language in exhibit development and can all speak it.
- We will start exhibit planning soon.

Other comments

- We in the Forest Service really appreciate being allowed to attend this session. We have nothing like it in our agency. It has been extremely helpful.
- Historic furnishings presentation was very interesting and entertaining.
- Thank you for opening the training to other agencies.
- Field trip was nice. Handout on media funding sources needs to be updated. There is no exhibit rehab money.
- Would have liked a copy of new copyright legislation referred to in session 303.
- Best course I've ever attended. Real stuff that will enable you to manage a project-know the process-know where to go for help. Wish I had it years ago.
- Thanks so much for allowing other agencies to participate. Would like to hear of more courses in the future. NCTC is a great center, would love to be able to utilize it more in the future.
- The majority of this course would apply to FWS employees. Would be nice to do a joint course with FWS breakouts for agency specific information. I also have thoughts/ideas

regarding using this course as the basics for a 2-week multi-agency "interpretive media institute?"

- Small technical things like remembering that students are adults. Not real enthused about pizza/beer party. Would have preferred to return to NCTC. Also stay on schedule. A good presenter should be able to stay within time constraints.
- Thanks for the experience; your efforts are very much appreciated.
- Are there samples of interagency visitor centers? I hope cooperation/partnerships are our future.
- Allow a little longer mid-day break for checking in with office and conducting other work
- Would love a course on the nitty gritty of building exhibits-materials, techniques- so I can understand contractors lingo.
- Excellent. Keep doing and providing more of this type of field oriented, how-to courses.
- Simply, thank-you!
- Well done. Enjoyed the course. Thank-you.



Course Coordinator, Dennis Vasquez, HFC
Course Program Assistant, Robin Butler, HFC
Course Program Assistant on detail, Stephanie Bagozzi, WASO
Training Manager, Gloria Baker, HFC
Park Liaison, Claire Comer, SHEN
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